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Individual production of social well-being

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE EXPLORATORY STUDY: METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Introduction

In the preceding chapters, the theoretical background and framework for this study were discussed. In the chapters 1 and 2 we were introduced to the field of subjective well-being, quality of life and social indicators, and we saw that this field of research is in need of a theory that can explain how objective conditions affect subjective well-being. Lindenberg's Social Production Function theory is a theory of how subjective well-being at the individual level comes about, depending on the individual's resources and constraints, and therefore possibly this theory can be useful for quality of life studies. In Chapter 3, SPF theory was discussed in depth, and the main respects in which it requires further elaboration were identified. Three research questions were derived, one concerning the conceptualisation of the three first-order goals for social well-being, the second concerning the essential 'ingredients' for the realisation of these three components of social well-being and the system of objective indicators that may be used, and the third concerning the incorporation of cognitive aspects, or metagoals, into the theoretical framework of SPF theory.

The present chapter discusses the methods that were used to obtain and analyse suitable data for answering these questions. I chose an exploratory approach for the empirical study, using qualitative data. In section 4.2. the rationale behind this approach is discussed. Section 4.3. explicates the criteria that I applied for selecting participants and the recruitment strategies that were used. Section 4.4. describes the data collection through focus group interviews and, complementary, a time use study and individual interviews. In section 4.5. the methods of analysis are discussed.

4.2. Main considerations for the research design

4.2.1. REFLECTING ON THE CHARACTER OF THE STUDY AND THE 'PRODUCT' IT IS TO YIELD

The aim of this study is to provide an empirical basis for refining the conceptualisations of the first-order instrumental goals in SPF theory and for incorporating metagoals in the theoretical framework, as well as to obtain a broad inventory of possible production functions for the production of social well-being. This inventory should provide an overview of the production functions that people apply and of the role of objective resources and restrictions in the

production of well-being for Dutch adults and, consequently, provide a basis for the development of a measurement instrument for the main relevant production factors for social well-being.

The research questions that were formulated in Chapter 3 are exploratory: the objective is *to explore* the contents of the concepts of status, behavioural confirmation and affection, *to explore* the cognitive aspects of well-being (or: metagoals) and their interrelations, and *to explore* the empirical variety in the resources and activities that people use in producing social well-being. Obviously, the research design should match these objectives. It should yield data that contain information about the various forms and guises in which people experience status, behavioural confirmation and affection, i.e. about the various aspects that make up these components of social well-being, and about the relation of these components with the main relevant means to attain them.

The research questions being of a largely exploratory character means, among other things, that it is not immediately obvious in advance what exactly the eventual 'product' or yield of answering them will be. It is far less clear than with quantitative research questions by what method the question may be answered or when, in fact, it is 'sufficiently' or adequately answered. Yet some clarification may be given that may prevent mistaken expectations. As implied in question's formulation, the product will be an *improved conceptualisation* of the first-order goals (or: components of social well-being), consisting of an identification of their various and distinctive *aspects*. What this means and why it may be valuable can be understood on the basis of the following. The terms 'status', 'behavioural confirmation', and 'affection' in SPF theory each refer to some part of reality, of people's real experience. Yet it is not exactly clear to what part of real experience each term refers in SPF theory. The terms are not exclusively used in SPF theory; at least 'status' and 'affection' are also used in different conceptual frameworks. And the relation between terms (or words) and meaning (or content) is not a simple, universal, or one-to-one relationship (cf. Quine 1980). Language is an abstract construction developed to exchange statements about 'reality', and the nouns of which a language consists are tools to be able to refer to parts of reality. But the variety of words that we avail of always falls short of the variety of reality. Thus, the words we use in communicating with others are in a sense category labels or multi-interpretable terms. Think, for clarification of this notion, of the almost infinite number of different shades of, say, yellow, that exist in reality, and of the limited number of words we have to designate these shades. In a way, the same inadequacy and lack of subtlety of language holds for the terms we have to designate forms of social well-being. There supposedly is an almost infinite variety of different feelings, perceptions and experiences of social well-being, and the number of words we have and want to use to refer to these is limited. So in SPF theory the words 'status' and 'affection' are used to refer to parts of the real experienced world which need not coincide exactly with the parts of reality for which others have used the same words. The object of the first research question is thus a thorough clarification of the 'meaning' of the terms 'status', 'behavioural confirmation', and 'affection' in SPF theory: to which parts the richness of reality do they refer in our use? This is different from formulating (new) definitions. Given the broad range of feelings and experiences of 'people' in general, to which the three first-order goals should refer, any definition that is broad enough to include all it is meant to include, would be too general and abstract to give a good sense of the concrete realities it is meant to contain or refer to. So I will not attempt to solve the problem by formulating (new) definitions (or in terms of informational logics: 'intensions') of status, behavioural confirmation and affection. Rather I intend to chart the 'area of reality' that the concepts are meant to designate (in terms of informational logics: provide relevant instances of their

‘extensions’) by identifying their main distinctive ‘aspects’. The term ‘aspects’ refers to the various forms which people experience and perceive each of the three components of well-being. In other words: ‘status’ (as well as affection or behavioural confirmation) has many ‘faces’, which I call ‘aspects’. Now by identifying the main distinctive aspects of each of the three first-order goals, the relation between the terms and their meaning or content in SPF theory is clarified. The ‘product’ of answering the first research question is thus an overview of the ‘extensions’ of the three first-order goals, or, in other words, an identification of the ‘faces’ or aspects of status, behavioural confirmation and affection, through which the meaning of these concepts is explicated. The identification of the distinctive aspects of status, behavioural confirmation and affection will aid the eventual construction of a measurement instrument for these concepts.

Using the analogy of shades and the names of colours, this study aims to hold a prism into the light we normally see in, by which we may distinguish the full range of shades from (ultra-) violet through (infra)red. The main objective of doing so, is to provide the observers not only with an overview of the whole colour-spectrum, but also with a fair image (or sense) of what shades belong to the primary colours. Even though observing the colour-spectrum and the variety of shades of ‘yellow’, ‘blue’ and ‘red’ does not provide the observer with a definition of these primary colours, it will help him far better henceforth to recognise shades and categorise them under the proper primary colour than would a scientific definition of the colours by their range of wavelength. In this analogy, the various shades that observers will be able to recognise and name within the range of one colour stand for the various aspects of the first-order goals. If you look around you to see how much blue there is around you, you will - almost unconsciously - count all the different shades, from ‘violet-blue’ and ‘lavender’ to shades like ‘aqua’, ‘petrol’ or other greenish-blues, as ‘blue’. The ‘aspects’ of the first-order goals relate to these goals in a similar way: although they are each somewhat different, together they make up ones total perception of ‘status’, ‘behavioural confirmation’ or ‘affection’.

The analogy may also clarify the difficulty of defining a strict boundary between the first-order goals. Like in the colour spectrum, where red gradually runs into orange and orange into yellow, there may not be clear borders between the different first-order goals, yet it may well be quite clear which of their aspects lie central in the ‘range’ of the first-order goal, and which border on one of the other first-order goals. Some aspects of, say, affection, may be clearly ‘pure’ affection, while other aspects may contain some hints of behavioural confirmation or status. Thus, even though at an abstract theoretical level we might formulate definitions of the status, behavioural confirmation and affection that can be sharply distinguished, the reality to which these concepts refer may be experienced rather like a continuum where the one kind of social well-being flows over into the other.

As argued in section 3.4.2., one of the present problems with the conceptualisations or definitions of the first-order goals is the entanglement of the content of the components of well-being with the means by which they are produced. One of the objectives of this study is to disentangle the aspects of the first-order goals and the main production factors by which they can be realised. It may appear, however, that even when distinguishing between feelings of well-being and objective resources and activities, the two are very closely related. People may have learnt to equate the production of certain goals, or even the means for producing certain goals, with the experience of these goals once produced: a kind of conditioning or mere anticipation. Yet even if people’s experience of status, behavioural confirmation and

affection tend to merge with having or using the means to realise these goals, the two levels can be distinguished theoretically. The components of social well-being always consist of 'feelings of...', while the production factors for realising them are not feelings but actual resources, conditions or activities. Using once more the analogy with the colour spectrum, we may see 'green' in various shades (its aspects), and we may also immediately think of green when we are being told of a mixture of blue and yellow (or see bits of blue and yellow combined). Yet as long as there are blue and yellow, there is not actually 'green': there are only the means of making green (the - in this case essential - production factors for green).

4.2.2. MATCHING THE RESEARCH DESIGN TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Ideally, the data that are collected should also provide an overview of the broad range of resources and activities that people may use to produce social well-being, and give insight in the relative efficiency of these production factors and in the functional relations between these production factors (i.e. whether they serve as complements or as substitutes).

The empirical study should, finally, yield data that contain information about people's preferences or goals concerning the ways in which they produce - and secure their production of - social well-being and about the connections of these goals with each other and with the other elements of SPF theory.

Obviously, for the main part we know but approximately what we are looking for, and thus we'd better not restrict the scope of the data collection a priori to the aspects of social well-being, the production factors or the metagoals that we can already think of¹. For this study, not only are there no adequate measurement instruments ready at hand, but they cannot directly be developed either, because it is not yet clear what exactly we would want to measure and which range of scores would be relevant. Clearly then, for answering the research questions we need qualitative data, upon which only marginal restrictions are imposed by the researcher concerning the contents and categories. The respondents should be allowed to choose their own concepts, categorisations and wordings concerning the topic they are asked, and when these data are collected, it is the researcher's task to interpret these idiosyncratic data and arrive at fitting concepts and conceptual frameworks.

The exploratory aims of the study ask for a design in which the representation of the whole range of variety in the subjective experiences of social well-being and of the way it is attained by members of the relevant population is achieved. The eventual aim of this study to contribute to quality of life studies implies that the elaboration of SPF theory should be as general as possible, that is, it should eventually be applicable in cross-national and cross-cultural studies. In the present stage of the enterprise, however, I take the Dutch adult population as the relevant population to which the theory and the inventory of production factors that will be developed should pertain. Only later, if the objectives of this study are realised for the Dutch adult population, it may be reasonable to investigate, in other studies, the possibilities to generalise and extend the results to wider populations. As a research

¹ If we would try to formulate a priori which aspects of well-being, which production factors and which metagoals we deem important, we'd run a serious risk of falling into either the pitfall of ethnocentrism (as introspection will unavoidably play a large role in hypothesizing about what matters) or that of building too uncritically on evidence from previous applications of SPF theory, overlooking that these studies were restricted to a specific category of the population, namely the (frail) elderly. We must take care to avoid these pitfalls in order to arrive at a broad inventory of relevant means to and aspects of social well-being that is valid and sensitive to the whole relevant population.

population from the Dutch adult population, then, we need such a selection of persons that we are likely to find both production factors and aspects of social well-being over the complete range of their empirical manifestations.

The results from a qualitative exploratory study such as this, cannot be regarded as 'hard' findings, they are rather empirically grounded hypotheses concerning the structure and determinants of social well-being for Dutch adults. As such, the results of this study provide a basis for further research. At least one follow-up is already in progress, namely the study of Nieboer (forthcoming) in which measurement instruments, based on the results of the present study, are developed and tested upon a representative sample of the Dutch population.

4.3. Recruitment and selection of participants for the qualitative study

4.3.1. THEORETICAL SAMPLING: SELECTION CRITERIA FOR OPTIMAL VARIATION IN THE CASE STUDIES

For the qualitative study, I had to find a selection of participants that satisfied two conditions: firstly, the selected participants should represent (as well as possible) the full range of empirical variety in how Dutch adults produce and experience social well-being, and secondly, the number of participants should be kept sufficiently small to avoid undue delay in consequence of excessive data management and analysis. Obviously, it could not be decided at forehand what number of participants would be 'sufficiently small', but I decided for an approximate selection size of between 20 and 40 people, of which at minimum 12 should be found fit and willing to participate in an extensive case study.

To secure optimal variation in the case studies, I chose a number of contrasts that I wanted to be represented in the study. The choice of desired contrasts was based on both theoretical considerations and previous empirical evidence of what variables affect people's social production functions and subjective (social) well-being. More specifically, three kinds of arguments guided the specification of selection criteria. Firstly, existing empirical knowledge should be drawn on: which background characteristics have been shown to affect either subjective well-being², social contacts or daily activity patterns? Secondly, some basic theoretical assumptions should be useful to identify or predict meaningful variation between categories of people. Which background characteristics should, according to SPF theory, result in large differences in the production of social well-being? Thirdly, ethnocentric imbalance in the theory and research of social production functions should be prevented or redressed, thus priority should be given to the representation of societal groups that differ from the typical 'highly educated, employed, high SES scientist'.

On the basis of the three types of arguments mentioned above, I chose eight background characteristics, which are expected to be important determinants of differences in people's

² Strictly speaking, only differences in activity patterns between categories of people can be interpreted as empirical evidence for differences in the social production functions of these categories. However, where we lack this direct evidence, also empirical findings showing that certain categories of people differ in subjective well-being should alert us. For when - after differences in objective resources are controlled for - one category of people scores lower on well-being than another, *one possible* reason is that this category utilizes the available resources in a different way i.e. that there exists some structural difference between the social production functions of the two categories of people.

production functions for social well-being³, and on which I thus wanted my cases to vary: 1. Age; 2. Gender; 3. Employment status; 4. Educational attainment; 5. Involvement in enduring partner relationship; 6. Parenthood; 7. Ethnicity; 8. Health.

Age is the first background characteristic that is obviously an important cause of variation in social production functions. In previous research on subjective well-being and quality of life, age was mostly found unrelated to happiness in bivariate analyses (except in studies using the Loneliness-scale of De Jong-Gierveld & Kamphuis (1985), where age was consistently found to relate positively to loneliness); but when looking at interaction effects with other variables, such as gender, health, marital status and labour market position, age seems to be an important source of variation in the way people produce their own (social) well-being. Both in previous studies on activity patterns (Mentzel et al. 1988; De Hart 1995; SCP 1995; Verbrugge et al. 1996) and in previous studies using SPF theory (Steverink 1996; Van Eijk 1997; Nieboer 1997) subjective well-being and social production functions were shown to be related to age.

The second background characteristic causing variation in social production functions could be gender. Significant effects of gender were seldom found in previous research on subjective well-being (Veenhoven 1984, p. 178), but several factors that do influence subjective well-being, such as income, employment status and (subjective health) are gender-related, which provides an argument to ensure the representation of both men and women in the case-studies. Studies on activity patterns did find significant gender-effects (Van Eijk 1997, p. 88-90; Hill 1985, p. 133-176; Juster 1985a, p. 177-204; SCP 1995). Although many of the gender effects may decrease or even disappear when controlling for some of the other background characteristics included in our list, gender may still have an independent effect. In any case, precisely because of strong interaction effects of gender with most of the other background characteristics, I wanted both sexes to be represented in my case studies.

The third background characteristic is employment status. This variable has been shown to have a strongly negative effect on subjective well-being (e.g. Edzes & Van Bruggen 1997; Van Bruggen 1999). Being out of work is generally believed to be detrimental to quality of life, and it clearly has a negative impact on social well-being and social participation (Engbersen 1990; Fryer 1988, 1992; Jahoda 1986). Obviously, unemployment also more generally influences people's activity patterns (SCP 1995).

The next background is educational attainment. Again, significant effects of educational attainment on both subjective well-being and activity patterns (Verkley & Stolk 1989; Ormel 1988; SCP 1995) have been found in previous research, even when controlling for employment status, although the effects are absent at the higher income levels and seem to be gradually declining in western nations (Veenhoven 1984, p. 198-205). In addition to the empirical arguments for including educational attainment as a variable on which we wanted our case studies to vary, it is also expected to be an important factor in (redressing) any

³ Indirectly, through seeking variation on these eight characteristics, I also obtained variation between my respondents in level of subjective well-being (which, in a sense, is the dependent variable in SPF theory). Selecting respondents directly on their level of subjective well-being, however, would have been problematic, both for practical reasons and because I would have had to rely on conceptualisations and measures of well-being of which I would not have been able to say to what extent they coincide with the concept of subjective well-being in SPF theory.

ethnocentric bias that might have slipped in during the development of SPF theory.

The fifth background characteristic is the presence of a stable partner-relationship. The positive effect of being involved in a (enduring) relationship with a romantic partner on practically all aspects of well-being has extensively been demonstrated in many studies (Veenhoven 1984, p. 233-237). Also in research on activity patterns and time use (Dow & Juster 1985, p. 397-414; Sullivan 1996) and in studies applying SPF theory (Steverink 1996; Van Eijk 1997; Nieboer 1997) it has been found that having a (stable) partner significantly affects the activities people engage in, and the benefits it brings them

The sixth background variable is parenthood, for which I not only distinguished between people who do or do not have children, but when there were children, I also sought variation between cases where there were children living at home and cases where they were living out of the parental home. Obviously, having children (living at home) affects one's activity pattern (SCP 1995), as well as the enjoyment of activities (Dow & Juster 1985, p. 397-414). Also, one's children may be both a source of social well-being (most importantly of affection) and a restriction for interaction with others, thus for utilising other sources of affection.

A further background variable of interest is ethnicity, or, more precisely, whether one has recently immigrated to the Netherlands. Although ethnic immigrants differ in many other ways (culture, religion, social economic position, gender- and family roles) from the 'average native Dutch person', our main interest is in this respect to see whether and how the social production functions differ for one who has recently left behind practically all his social network and whom, for daily social approval, largely depends on recently established, possibly few, social relationships (a recent study of the social participation of unemployed suggests that indeed immigrants differ from native Dutch unemployed both in their average subjective well-being and in various forms of social participation, cf. Edzes & Van Bruggen 1997).

The eighth background variable is (perceived) health. As has been shown in several previous studies, health can be an important restriction on people's daily activities (Nieboer 1997; Van Eijk 1997) and it is also significantly related to subjective well-being (Veenhoven 1984, p. 268-273). Therefore, given our aim to obtain a maximally broad inventory of possible social production functions, some variation in the health status of our case studies is desirable.

Of course, other personal characteristics can be thought of that are also related to subjective well-being, activity patterns or both: e.g. self-efficacy, extraversion et cetera. However, the eight background variables I chose do not require the use of testing procedures or elaborate measurement instruments⁴ and are thus more practicable as selection criteria in our study. Also, if important variations in production functions would indeed be found for people that differ in these background variables, it might in eventual applications of the diagnostic tools (the system of indicators that will be developed) be desirable to have the possibility of focussing, for selected subgroups, on these particular elements that differ from the population at large. The possibility of doing this requires that the various categories of respondents,

⁴ Possibly, 'health' is an exception to this, depending on how it is operationalised. In the present case, however, a simple self-rating item for state of health suffices, or we might use a rough indicator (with doubtful validity but high practical relevance) such as entitlement to physical incapability-benefits (WAO)).

whom one would want to ask extra questions, be easy to identify, also in large scale surveys; the eight background variables used here could eventually be used to this aim, whereas using assessments of e.g. self-efficacy or extraversion would pose considerable practical problems.

I did not specify (based on the background variables) detailed profiles for the participants to be recruited. If I had wanted to represent all possible combinations of scores on the eight selection variables, this would have led to minimally 256 different profiles; a number that by far exceeds anything I could manage. Instead, facilitated by the incremental recruitment of participants, I sought to get at least, for both sexes, one working and one unemployed participant, one parent and one childless person, one single and one espoused person, one highly and one lowly educated person, one older and one younger person, one person in good health and one with problematic health, and one person from an ethnic minority and one 'born Dutch'. These were the minimal criteria I used for achieving the desired variety in case studies, beyond meeting these criteria I of course strove to find the most interesting and varied combinations of background variables.

4.3.2. THE PRACTICAL RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Multiple methods were used for the targeted recruitment of participants. Firstly, advertisements were placed in supermarkets, sports facilities, pubs, pharmacies and public libraries to attract various kinds of people. Secondly, advertisements were distributed door-to-door in several streets in different parts of the city of Groningen. Thirdly, chair people from several associations, including a women's association (NCVB), a men's snooker club and a gospel choir, were found willing to distribute advertisements at meetings of their groups. Fourthly, students of a 'HOVO'-course (modular education for older people) were approached and asked to participate.

For attracting parents of young children, advertisements were placed at playgartens and health-care offices. For recruiting (long-term) unemployed participants, social welfare workers and employees of centres for social activation were found willing to provide some addresses and introduce us to their clients. Ten participants for the focus-group discussions were recruited in this way.

For attracting recent immigrants, the Centre for Islamic Affairs in Groningen was approached to help us get in contact with potential participants, the parents of children visiting a club for disadvantaged youths were approached and again social welfare workers were asked to recruit clients from the cultural minorities who were interested to participate in the case-studies. Five participants were recruited in this way. Finally, some participants were recruited via snowball sampling.

The recruitment, as described above, yielded but small numbers of volunteers, which enrolled only one by one. As I planned at most twenty case studies, this was not really a problem, but it did mean that it was impractical to wait until, say, fifty volunteers had enrolled and then take the most ideal selection of cases. Apart from incurring a serious time delay before the case studies could begin, that method would have meant a large risk of losing volunteers due to declining motivation to participate if they had to wait too long. Therefore I used a twofold strategy. In the first place I first took whatever cases applied, and only later focussed the recruitment and selection specifically on groups with characteristics that had remained underrepresented thus far. In the second place I started the case studies by focus group discussions (see section 3.3.) comprising five participants (simply in order of recruitment) each. The information about each of the participants, collected in the group discussions, thus

enabled me to start out with the most interesting (most different) cases for the more intensive time-use studies. The possibly less interesting cases could thus be kept 'in stock', to be decided on later. Initially, all recruits were thus appointed to a certain focus group. When, subsequently, some categories of the predefined criteria for the case studies began to fill up, I proceeded with more selective recruitment in order to fill also the still empty categories and thus to get the desired variation in cases.

It was necessary for the aim of the qualitative study to recruit participants that are able and willing to give extensive and detailed information about the way they produce and experience (social) well-being - be it much or little - in their living situation. The drawback of a possible distortion induced by overrepresentation of "extravert" people, seems impossible to evade. This drawback does have one advantage however, as it will, in all likelihood, positively affect the detail and sincerity of the information given.

Eventually, 31 people were recruited to participate in the focus group interviews, 12 men and 19 women, from 22 to 76 years of age (mean age 44). Further background characteristics of the 31 respondents are reported in appendix A.

4.4. Methods of data collection: focus group discussions and time use study

4.4.1. THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

As a first step in the qualitative study, focus group interviews were conducted, in which all later participants of the case studies took part. These focus group discussions served a triple aim:

- 1) they provided additional information on which the selection of participants for the case studies could be based;
- 2) they provided a large number of statements on subjective well-being and the first-order goals of SPF theory, which were used to answer the first research question, i.e. the further conceptualisation of these goals and their particular manifestations in people's perception;
- 3) they provided important though incomplete information on the specific use of production factors by the participants for the case studies.

The method of focus groups was chosen because of its appropriateness for investigating topics that are still largely unexplored (although Merton & Kendall (1946) claimed that moderators in focus-groups needs 'previous knowledge', see Vaughn et al. 1996, p. 4), as is the case with the social production functions people in various tracks of life use to achieve social well-being. But most importantly, the method of focus groups is most suitable when the aim is to obtain a broad inventory of respondents' point of view. Other group interview procedures often aim at consensus building or problem solving (Vaughn et al., p. 5, 6), and the use of surveys and structured questionnaires tends to impose the point of view of the researcher (Krueger 1994, p. 7). In general, the method of focus-groups is supposed to work because it "taps into human tendencies" (Krueger, p. 10): while mail and telephone interviews may suffer from an unjust assumption that individuals really know how they feel, and form their opinions in isolation, the claimed strength of focus group interviews lies in the fact that "people may need to listen to opinions of others before they form their own personal viewpoints. Although some opinions may be developed quickly and held with absolute certainty, other opinions are malleable and dynamic. Evidence from focus group interviews

suggests that people do influence each other with their comments and in the course of a discussion the opinions of an individual might shift” (Krueger, p. 11; see also Albrecht 1993). This function of increasing awareness of one's own opinions and feelings is important for the present study, as the paradigm of rational choice, in which SPF theory is embedded, does not assume that people are aware of (all) the utility arguments in choosing their actions. It is not assumed that people are consciously aware of their social production functions, nor even of the fact that they are, somehow, producing social approval through what they are doing. Therefore, in order to get some of these possibly unconscious processes to the surface, the group interaction in discussing determinants or influences of well-being is highly desirable. This strength of the focus group interview method may at the same time be its weakness. Just because of the influence participants exert on each other, we may end up with less variation in statements than would be representative of the participants' actual views. Certain topics - in casu certain production factors or activities - may not even come up, just because so much attention is drawn to the - not necessarily more important - topics that happen to come up first, leading to a distorted view of what are relevant production factors.

The remedy I used for this threat of the group process turning contraproductive, is the following. About two weeks in advance of each planned focus group discussion, I sent the participants of that focus group a questionnaire (appendix B) with very open questions on the following topics: subjective well-being in general and in a number of life domains⁵; global pattern of weekly activities; some of the possible benefits of the reported activities; and things or values that the participant personally deems essential for being happy. In addition the questionnaire included the Loneliness-scale of De Jong-Gierveld & Kamphuis (1985) and Bradburn's (1969) Affect Balance Scale for validation purposes, and questions on personal background characteristics.

The participants were instructed to fill in this questionnaire and asked to return it a week before the planned group discussion. This pre-focus-group questionnaire was intended to evade the threat of contra productive group influence processes in two ways. First, by carefully screening the completed questionnaires before moderating the focus group discussion, I could draw up a list of topics for discussion that included at least all topics that had come up as relevant in the individual answers to the questionnaires. During the focus group discussions this list (appendix C) was used as a checklist to prevent that certain topics would not be discussed. Also the levels of subjective well-being and domain-satisfactions were indicated on this checklist, and when participants tended to fall in agreement with each other regarding a positive or negative evaluation of their well-being, the moderator could intervene by saying: “Still, some of you have given answers very much at the negative (positive) end of the scale for this aspect of life. So there may be some less positive (negative) aspects to this matter also. Can we also discuss some of these?” Second, the very fact that the participants were asked to complete the questionnaire may have had a sensitising function.

⁵ The subjective well-being questions were designed to get some impression of possibly problematic areas of life for the participants, without forcing or allowing the participant to ‘pin’ himself to some numerical judgment already. Therefore we asked the participants to indicate, by putting a cross on a line ranging from ‘the worst possible life’ to ‘the best possible life’ (an adapted form of Cantrill's (1965) well-being question), how they at the moment felt about their life in general, respectively the various life domains. In a pilot study conducted in 1996 among third grade sociology students, this version of the well-being item appeared less vulnerable to social desirability bias and to people's own norms about valuing their own life with either a score below the middle point of the range or at the positive extreme than versions of the well-being questions asking a score on a range from zero to ten.

Because there was a time lag of about a week between answering the questions and discussing the topics, the respondents - especially when they had not consciously thought about the topic previously - had some time to form their own thoughts about it. Although not controllable, this possibility seemed desirable.

The focus groups consisted of mostly 5 (and maximally 7) participants, who were in most cases mutual strangers. In the literature concerning focus group research (Morgan 1988, p. 43; Vaughn et al. 1996 p.5; Krueger 1994, p. 6), the prescribed group size is usually between 7 and 10. I decided to use somewhat smaller groups because of the broad nature of the research topic: while, 'traditionally', focus groups are used mostly to investigate, say, the processes behind people's emotional reactions to a certain stimulus, or to explore customers preferences and feelings about a specific kind of product, the investigation of social production functions may in fact include about all human activities and resources. Therefore, in order to allow each participant to express his views on at least the main constituents of his social production functions, I had to reduce the group size. In fact, after conducting one focus group discussion with 7 participants, I decided to maintain a maximum of 5 for the remainder of the project, as the 7-person group proved too large to allow each participant to talk about all that he deemed relevant.

With regard to the participants' background, the focus groups were more or less randomly composed, using only the following general criterion: there should be some, but not too much difference in background characteristics of the participants per group. Some differences are desirable, because a discussion with other respondents who are too similar in many respects might fail to elicit differences of opinion and fail to trigger the intended process of becoming aware of things. But too large differences between the participants, in particular large differences in education and ability to formulate thoughts, might discourage part of the group to speak freely. I therefore organised separate focus groups for the participants that were recruited through institutions for social welfare, minority groups and unemployment agencies. Eventually there were three focus groups of general composition, one group with participants from ethnic minorities, and three groups of unemployed people. The latter three groups were somewhat smaller in size (three or four participants) than the other groups, due to a high dropout rate (participants not appearing on the appointed day).

In the focus group discussions, which took 2 through 3 hours per session, people were asked to discuss factors they consider important for their own well-being or happiness. As a rule, the focus group discussions were started by asking the participants whether they had found it difficult to complete the questionnaire and which were the questions to which they had not had an answer ready. Next, each of the participants was asked which determinants would come first in their minds if they were now again asked how well they liked their present lives. They were encouraged to elaborate on these, and other participants could freely interrupt. As mostly the participants would start out with mentioning factors that influence their quality of life positively, the next question would be what factors they found negatively influencing their well-being at present. After these 'open' rounds, the ensuing discussion was regularly fed with topics from the checklist. Additionally, when certain topics came up, about which previous focus group discussions had provided statements very different from what seemed to be the opinions in the current group, such statements were put forward for the current participants to react on. Finally, the moderator also guarded that, though of course implicitly, the first order goals for social approval, as stated in SPF theory, (status, behavioural confirmation and affection) were all amply covered in the discussion. If one of these first-order goals had not received sufficient attention already, the moderator intervened by bringing

the topic up. In all focus group discussions I took the role of moderator.

The complete group sessions were audio- and videotaped for later transcription. The audiotapes were used for verbal transcription, and only when it was not clear from these which of the participants was speaking, the videotapes were used to ascertain. Each transcribed statement could thus be given a code corresponding with the participant who gave it. The analysis of the thus obtained transcripts is described in section 4.5.

4.4.2. COMPLEMENTARY DATA COLLECTION: TIME USE STUDY AND ADDITIONAL INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

One aim of the qualitative study is to obtain a broad inventory of possible production factors for social approval, through reconstructing the social production functions of the participants. But as participants may be only partially aware of their social production functions (see above), I decided not to rely solely on the focus group interviews, but rather use a triangulation of methods, minimising the chance that important elements of the production functions are missed or that overly co-operative behaviour of participants (trying to provide information even when they are unsure about it) leads to distortions in the reconstructed social production functions. Besides the focus group discussions I therefore used two additional methods of data collection: time use inventories and individual in-depth interviewing. Both were used only as complementary and supportive to the data collection via the focus group interviews. Of course, both additional methods can be applied much more extensively than I did and the data collected through these methods could have been analysed much more thoroughly, with specifically tailored methods. But for the purpose of this study it sufficed to use these data as a check upon the participant's information from the focus group interview, and time constraints did not allow additional analyses of the time use data with specialised methods.

The reason for applying time use inventories is quite straightforward: as I assume that people 'produce' their own (social) well-being, the productive activities by which resources are transformed into forms of social approval should show up in a systematic recording of daily activities⁶.

The time use inventories that were applied were designed to provide a complete inventory of the respondent's activities during 7 subsequent days, including the main social aspects of these activities and their immediate contribution to subjective well-being. Obviously, people cannot report literally everything they do, even if they would be willing to try. In time use research, different solutions are used, the objective of the study determining which solution suits best. One method is the use of beepers that go off at random time intervals; when the beeper goes off, the respondent has to report what he is doing at that exact moment, and usually answer a number of additional questions about this activity. This method is

⁶ Given the definitions of status, behavioural confirmation and affection, one could argue that only the production of behavioural confirmation should be visible in recordings of daily activities, as the other components of social approval are not produced by what one does, but by what one has or is. I believe this objection to be true only in a strict sense: I would argue that also the other two first order goals may become visible in time use studies, be it rather in the form of activities where previously produced status and affection is *consumed* than produced. And, for all we know, such consumptive activities might be indispensable for the preservation of once produced status and affection (indeed for affection it will be seen in Chapter 6 that 'spending time together' is one of the main production factors, while it is of course also the consumption of affection).

particularly popular in mood research. A second method is the use of direct survey questions in which respondents are asked either retrospective information about their time use or they are asked to give estimates of their general activity patterns, also based on retrospection. A third method is to have respondents fill in all their subsequent activities, including the time they started and ended these activities. This method provides the most complete inventory of activities, if it is indeed followed conscientiously, which is not easy. A somewhat different method again is to ask respondents to report at regular time intervals what they have been doing in the past interval (also additional questions about these activities can of course be posed). This method is somewhat easier for respondents than the former one. It provides a moderately complete inventory of activities, in which especially activities of very short duration and activities that are so habitual that people perform them almost unconsciously (e.g. washing your hands, closing the curtains) are likely to be underreported⁷. Balancing the relevance and detail of collected data against the ease of use for respondents (and thus the probability of not dropping out during the study), I decided to use the latter method. I first tested whether it was feasible to let people report per 15 minutes what they had been doing, by trying to keep such a diary for a week myself and asking two friends to try this. The interval of 15 minutes appeared to short to keep up, so I changed this to 30 minutes, this turned out to be a rate that respondents could deal with.

So every half hour⁸ respondents had to report their activity over the past interval, and it was also asked where they were, whether they were alone, with whom they were, whether there was a social interaction and at whose initiative, and how well they liked what they were doing in this interval (as compared with the foregoing interval). In case of extremes or large changes in enjoyment, respondents were asked to indicate the reasons for this. The activities were not only reported verbally, but respondents also added an activity-code, which primarily categorises activities into clusters of similar functional context, such as 'paid work', 'house making', 'child care and informal care', 'basic life activities', 'sports and recreation'. The coding scheme for the activities was a slightly simplified version from the coding schemes used by the SCP. I decided that besides verbal descriptions, coding of activities was desired to ensure the interpretability of the verbal descriptions of activities. These verbal descriptions were often very short and ambiguous, like 'talking', or 'driving the car', whereas I wanted to be able to derive the place of the activities in people's social production functions, thus: was he talking to his friend or to a client at work, and was she driving her children to their music lessons or making a tourist trip? In section 4.5. it is explained how the context-based activity codes were used to relate the time use data to the data from the focus group interviews.

Respondents used structured forms to report their time use, each page covering six hours, four pages per day; the complete time use diary thus consisted of 28 such pages. Appendix B shows one page of the time use inventories, and also the main categories of the activity codes.

⁷ Of course, there exist many variations of these methods of collecting time use data, but for our study the typical methods mentioned here were the main relevant alternatives. For a comparison of different modes of collecting time use data, see Robinson (1977, 1985), or also Juster (1985b).

⁸ The respondents were instructed, however, to let the normal performance of their activities prevail over the exact keeping of 30 minutes intervals in case the filling in of the time use diary would seriously interfere with or disrupt their normal business. Thus, for activities lasting over 30 minutes and not allowing the regular interruption for filling in the diary, respondents were instructed not to abstain from these activities while participating in the time use study, but rather to memorize what happened and fill in the diary as soon as possible afterwards for the time intervals of that activity.

After the seven-day time use inventory was completed, the forms were returned to me by mail or I went by to fetch them. By that time, the transcripts of the corresponding focus group interviews would be ready, and I could compare the time use reports with the respondent's statements in the transcripts. When in the time use reports any activities turned up that were not mentioned in the focus group interview, as well as when I noted anything remarkable in the combinations of the reported activities and the enjoyment thereof, I listed this as a topic to be asked in an additional individual interview. After thus preparing, per respondent, a list of remaining topics for the concluding individual interviews, I made appointments with them and discussed these points. The information obtained in the individual interviews was concisely written down, incidentally including verbal citations, and added to the focus group interview transcripts of the respective respondents.

Not all participants of the focus group interviews were willing to additionally participate in the time use study: 16 of the 31 participants started keeping a diary. Two of these dropped out during the time use study. In appendix A the 14 remaining participants to the time use study are described with regard to some background characteristics.

4.5. Method of analysis of the qualitative data

4.5.1. QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS: BASIC PRINCIPLES

For qualitative analyses of the kind of data I had collected, with an exploratory objective, there are no such ready-to-use methodologies, or 'recipes', as for the statistical analysis of quantitative data, where hypothesis testing is the main objective. Although there are various enlightening methodological publications on qualitative research in the social sciences, most of these are at best specific about the methods of data collection, and leave the methods of analysis and interpretation largely open. Even Glaser & Strauss' *The discovery of grounded theory* (1967), although fully dedicated to the principles of qualitative analysis, provides no concrete methods for doing this⁹. Still, there are many valuable insights and useful tools to be found in Glaser and Strauss, as is also indicated by the innumerable references to it in practically all handbooks on qualitative methods (e.g. Miles & Huberman 1994; Weitzman & Miles 1995). It is not relevant here to fully discuss the merits and problems of the grounded theory approach; I will just touch upon some useful notions in Glaser and Strauss (ibid.) that I have found helpful in designing and conducting my own analyses.

The main useful tools in Glaser and Strauss (1967) that were relevant to the analyses of my data, are the following. Firstly, Glaser and Strauss advocate what they call the constant comparative method. This method consists of three interrelated elements: theoretical sampling, critical experiments and structured comparisons. Together these elements represent a focussed and systematic way of collecting and analysing or interpreting qualitative data. The

⁹ Partly, this lack of prescribed procedures seems to follow logically from the lack of uniformity in types of qualitative data and, more importantly, in the objectives of qualitative research. However, I believe that it is well possible to explicate the procedure of qualitative analysis much further than is currently done, and that, if a clear indication is added of the particular objectives which a certain procedure is designed to meet, researchers will be able to adjust the suggested steps of analysis according to the particularities of their own research aims. As we will see shortly, Wester (1995) is one of the few who provide a 'handbook' of this kind.

first element, theoretical sampling, is a very goal-directed way of data collection: it basically means that the researcher first specifies his theoretical questions and expectations (e.g., of what would be relevant variations), and then based on these, decides what data he needs to collect to answer his questions. Of course, this procedure can be iterated when the researcher has gained new insights that are relevant to his research questions. This very focussed way of data collection is highly efficient, which is a great advantage, especially in the usually quite labour-intensive qualitative research. The second element of the constant comparative method, the critical experiment, is closely related to the idea of theoretical sampling. Critical experiments are 'tests' of the ideas and theoretical hypotheses that the researcher develops during the analyses: when I found (see also chapter 6) that 'being busy' can be a direct source of status, that is, that people tend to look up to others who are busy, I hypothesised that being busy is a generalised indicator of the amount of scarce (thus valued) capacities that people have, and only therefore elicits status, not because being busy per se is valued. If this idea would be correct, a person that is known to have many scarce skills (e.g. through public performance or through the position he holds at work), would receive status irrespective of his 'being busy', he would possibly even get more status if he managed not to be busy. At the other hand, a person that is known to have few valued skills, would not receive status for being busy either, again rather the reverse. The critical experiment in this case would consist in finding two such persons, and investigating whether my hypotheses find support. The third element, structured comparisons, is implied by the first two elements. It means that the analyst should on the basis of theoretical considerations and expectations decide at forehand which would be relevant contrasts (i.e. between which cases he expects variation in the variables and mechanisms of interest), that he should see to it that these contrast should be present in his data, and subsequently, that he should compare the contrasting cases for all aspects of the theoretical problem he is working on.

Secondly, Glaser and Strauss introduced the term sensitising concepts, denoting the preliminary ideas of the researcher that constitute his way of looking at the data. There is a false notion around that in the grounded theory approach the researcher starts out by looking completely open at his data, but this is refuted by Glaser and Strauss' emphasis on the use of sensitising concepts. Indeed, as anyone who has ever attempted to open-code data without any pre-existing notions of what one is looking for should know, the whole idea that coding without sensitising concepts is even possible is naive. It therefore seems a sound advice to make ones sensitising concepts explicit from the start, for two reasons. In the first place it saves the researcher from drowning in his data. In the second place, and no less important, it makes the coding and interpretation open to replication and to critique.

Thirdly, although they are not the only nor the first authors who use the term and the practice, Glaser & Strauss stress the importance of memoing. Writing memo's refers to the essential, indispensable habit in qualitative analysis to write down any ideas or guesses about the topic, the relation between concepts et cetera, at each stage of the research. Miles and Huberman (1984, p.69), quoting Glaser, express the value of memoing as follows:

"Fieldwork is so fascinating, and coding usually so energy-absorbing, that you can get preoccupied and overwhelmed with the flood of particulars (...) You forget to think, to make deeper and more general sense of what is happening, to begin to explain it in a conceptually coherent way. Reflective remarks, marginal remarks and pattern coding are all a step away from the immediate toward the more general. (...) We can hardly do better than Glaser's (1978) definition: "[A memo is] the theorising write-up of ideas about codes

and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding...it can be a sentence, a paragraph or a few pages... it exhausts the analyst's momentary ideation based on data with perhaps a little conceptual elaboration." Memos are always conceptual in intent. They do not report data, but they tie different pieces of data together in a cluster, or they show that a particular piece of data is an instance of a general concept."

The most important advice Miles and Huberman give with regard to memoing is to

"always give priority to memoing. When an idea strikes, STOP whatever else you are doing and write the memo (...) Include your musings of all sorts, even the fuzzy and foggy ones. (...) Don't self-censor." (ibid., p. 71).

Memoing and this piece of advice may strike the reader who has no experience in qualitative analysis as odd, tedious and time-consuming, but during my research I learned that, though it is indeed tedious (indeed I don't think I have ever had such a heavy exercise in disciplined thinking), it constitutes one of the central tools for qualitative analysis. In qualitative analysis, results never just 'pop up' such as when performing computerised statistical analyses; results only consist in the analyst's interpretations. And, to prevent the first or most conventional or most superficial interpretation to be adopted without carefully considering all other possible interpretations, it is essential to follow and report each lead, each beginning of an idea about the data. This ensures that, when rereading ones memos, all potential interpretations that have crossed the analysts mind, receive consideration, and the best suited or most relevant (set of) interpretation(-s) can be selected from these.

Most authors (e.g. Glaser 1978; Glaser & Strauss 1967; Wester 1984, 1995) advise to distinguish between types of memos, as usually the stack of memos grows very fast during an analysis. Usually it is advised to distinguish theoretical and methodical memo's; the first serving for ideas regarding the theory, the concepts and the relations between the concepts, and the second type serving to report all ideas with regard to the subsequent steps in data collection and analysis. Often, however, I found that ideas I wrote down were relevant both to the emerging theory and to the collection of new data (the inseparability is clear when considering theoretical sampling) or new steps in the analysis. Therefore I changed to ordering my memos according to the level and elements of SPF theory for which they were relevant.

Useful as the tools and advice discussed above may be, they provide but little guidance for the inexperienced qualitative analyst. That is where, in my study, the work of Wester (1984, 1995; Peters & Wester 1995) came in to provide more structure and fill the methodological lacunas. Wester largely conforms to Glaser and Strauss' grounded theory approach, but he developed this into a more concrete method, through distinguishing identifiable steps in the analysis.

The general sequence of steps or phases in a qualitative analysis following a grounded theory approach, according to Wester (1995, p. 52-73) would be: 1) exploration; 2) specification; 3) reduction; and 4) integration.

The *phase of exploration* as described in Wester (ibid., p. 53-58) in fact largely precedes the analysis of the qualitative data that is described in this section. Wester distinguishes two steps within the exploration phase. The first step consists of many preparatory activities: specification of the background of the study; construction of a preliminary conceptual framework (i.e. choice of preliminary sensitising concepts); specification of research questions; choice of units for analysis; and first partial data collection. The second step serves to arrive at a formulation of preliminary concepts on the basis of the first materials, and

consists of the following activities: transcription of the chosen research materials, open coding of the transcripts and summarising the first impressions.

The main objective of the *phase of specification* is (Wester 1995, p. 58-63) to elaborate the central concepts with maximum detail. In other words, the second phase is concerned with achieving saturation of the main concepts. Saturation is achieved when all relevant aspects and manifestations of the concept are represented in the analysis. In order for saturation to be possible, complete coverage of the relevant field in the material is obviously needed; if the researcher still lacks data about some sub-fields, he cannot be sure whether the main concepts are saturated.

The *specification phase* consists of five steps. The first step serves to test the developed preliminary concepts on new material and involves the choice, transcription and coding of new units or new material, and the reporting of results. The second step serves to further elaborate and classify the major central concepts, and involves the selection and structured comparison of interview or observation segments according to main codes, and the reporting of results. The third step serves to elaborate dimensions and indicators of the central concepts, and involves the selection of interview segments according to sub-codes of a main concept; comparison of these segments; identification of dimensions and dimension-poles; and the definition of dimensions and their indicators. The fourth step serves to construct variables on the basis of the dimensions that were identified in step 3. In this step a new level of analysis is chosen: the analyses proceeds from the level of the concepts to the level of the units (respondents, texts etc.). The fourth step involves the construction of summaries per dimension per unit, comparison of segments per unit; making summaries per unit, comparison of summaries over the units and classification of units. The fifth and last step of the specification phase serves to investigate the interrelatedness in the classification of variables, and involves the making and comparison of summaries per dimension per unit; identification of the relations between variables; and reporting of and reflection on these.

The third phase in the qualitative analysis as described by Wester (ibid., p. 63-69) is called *the reduction phase*. This phase concerns the identification of relations between the main concepts, in particular the relations between the central concept and other concepts. Four steps are distinguished in this phase of the analysis. The first step serves to identify which concepts are central in the study at the moment, and involves an inventory of memo's to see which concepts are central; choice and transcription of new material; selective coding of the new material using the developed indicators and variables, and reporting of results in memo. The second, third and fourth steps are alternative ways to identify the core concept of the developing theory. The second step serves to help identify the most central concept, using summaries per unit, and involves the selection of fragments per unit which are relevant to the central concepts; composing an overview per unit of the central concepts and their relations; writing a memo in which the candidates for the main central concept are listed and possible hypotheses are formulated. The third step serves to help identify the most central concept, using all scenes from the complete material that reflect the relation between two or more of the central concepts. This step involves the selection of fragments that reflect relations between central concepts; composing of overviews of suggested relations; and formulation of memo's and hypotheses. The fourth step, which concludes the reduction phase serves to derive interpretations from the previously made overviews, and involves an interpretative analysis of the memo and overviews, resulting in a concluding memo with hypothesis regarding the most central concept and its relations to other concepts. It should be noted that not just the empirical material should be used in the reduction phase, but it is advised to also make use of the relevant (theoretical) literature.

The fourth and final phase as described by Wester (ibid., p. 69-72) is called the *integration phase* and revolves around the integration with the central concept of all ideas that were generated from the data ('integrative fit'). In other words, in the fourth phase the theory around the central concept is elaborated.

Two steps are distinguished in the integration phase. The first step serves to complete the conceptual framework and the integration of all components of the analytic framework in the conceptual framework, and involves systematic study of literature to support and possibly add to the relations that were formulated; detailed reporting; and recapitulating the results to the research questions. A memo should be written here which carefully considers whether the materials that have been collected up to this point sufficiently meet the requirements of the definitive formulation of the research question. In the second step of the integration phase, the definitive research question is answered through testing of the conceptual framework. This step involves - again - collection of additional material; final coding of this material using the final formulations of the developed variables; focussed analysis; and reporting of results.

Although the four phases described above, and the steps constituting them give the researcher some indispensable grip on, and means for orientation in the process of the qualitative analysis, they are not intended as an absolute or uniform 'recipe' for doing grounded theory analysis. Wester explicitly encourages researchers to think critically about the objectives and the starting point of the analysis they intend to perform, and to choose an appropriate selection and sequence of the steps he describes (ibid., p.127,128). In the present study, I have chosen a procedure for the analysis of the focus group and in-depth interview data that is inspired by, yet clearly deviates from the general sequence of phases and steps. The procedure that I incrementally developed and used to analyse my data is explained in section 4.5.3. First, section 4.5.2. reports on a practical aspect of the qualitative analyses: the use of computerised coding and retrieval tools.

4.5.2. COMPUTERISED CODING, RETRIEVAL AND CONCEPTUAL MODEL BUILDING: THE USE OF ATLAS/TI

Computer technology has vastly increased the practicability of extensive and systematic analysis of qualitative data (Weitzman & Miles 1995; Popping 1996). Various specialised software packages have been developed for qualitative or content analysis. The basic function that almost all of these packages share is that of a tool for coding and (selective, systematic) retrieval of data fragments. Having the computer do these 'secretarial' tasks of qualitative analysis saves not only an enormous amount of time and dull work, it consequently also facilitates much more focussed and complicated analyses of the data. The main differences in the presently available software for qualitative analysis of texts concern the particular tools they offer for the more advanced methods of analysis, and the emphasis they place on various aspects of such advanced analyses.

For the present project, the coding and retrieval options were of course indispensable, but also a few more advanced options seemed useful, most importantly the network building tools some software packages offer. Network building in this sense is basically just the exploration, specification and visualisation of relations between codes (referring to theoretical concepts) that were used in coding the data, and may be extended by distinguishing between different logical relations, and subsequently, deriving hypotheses about the interrelations between not directly related concepts and checking the consistency of the theoretical network. I wanted the network building tool in order to be able to work on a representation of the internal structure of the first order instrumental goals (status, behavioural confirmation and affection), as well as

for deriving a conceptual network of the metagoals, the quality-aspects of social production functions.

After exploring the possibilities of some widely used packages that offer some sort of network building tools, such as Kwalitan, Nu*dist and Aquad, I chose to work with Atlas/ti 4.0 (Muhr 1996, 1993). The advantage of this software package is, besides it being user-friendly, that it offers a very flexible tool for building conceptual networks. In most other packages the network building option only allows networks that have some tree-like structure, which is most suitable for classification schemes, while in Atlas/ti the only restriction to the shape of the networks one builds is that the program does not allow inconsistent loops of relations between codes. It was not likely that a tree-like structure would be adequate for representing the way in which different quality-aspects of production functions are related to each other and to subjective well-being, nor for the internal structure (between the different aspects) of the first order instrumental goals. A further advantage of the Atlas/ti network building tool is that it allows any elements of one's working file (the hermeneutic unit) to be defined as nodes in the conceptual network, thus it is possible to build a network in which not only concept-codes, but also quotations and memo's can be related to each other. This feature greatly increases the ease of access to all information one would want to use in reporting the results of the analyses.

In order to prepare the transcriptions of the focus-group discussions for analysis in Atlas/ti, they were divided into segments (quotations). As a rule, the delineation of the quotations followed the natural change of speaker: every time a respondent takes the word, a new quotation starts, which ends at the moment another respondent or the moderator takes the word again. In several instances I deviated from this criterion for delineating the quotations. Firstly, when the quotation that would have resulted would have lacked sufficient information to know what the respondent was talking about. In such instances, the quotation was extended with as many sentences from the preceding text as the researcher deemed necessary to clarify the statement in the specific quotation. Secondly, when the quotation that would have resulted would be very long (e.g. over fifteen or twenty sentences) and would have contained multiple substantive statements. In such instances, the quotation was divided into two or more smaller quotations, according to its substantive content, as judged by the researcher. Thirdly, when the quotation that would have resulted would have lacked any substantive content (like when a respondent asks someone to repeat a remark that he did not hear well, or when it is just some conversational "hum's"), the fragment was not marked as a quotation for analysis. This set of rules for delineating quotations in the transcripts, led to a large number of - sometimes partly overlapping - quotations that each belonged to one respondent exclusively. To each quotation a case number was added, referring to the person who was speaking, so that, when storing and retrieving quotations from different focus group interviews for analysis, it would be continually clear whose statements I dealt with. For the first, exploratory analyses, I prepared three text bases, one for each of the first three focus group interviews I had conducted. Each text base consisted of the complete set of statements from all participants to that particular focus group discussion. The rationale for keeping the statements from the same focus group into one text base was that frequently respondents reacted to one another during the focus group interview, thus many quotations consist of both remark and reaction of two different participants. All research questions were first explored using only the data from these three focus group interviews (17 respondents). The material was thus split up, so that after the first half was used for exploratory analyses,

the second part of the data could be used for seeking confirmation of the emerging concepts and theoretical relations. In other words, the categories and interpretations that are developed on the first part of the material could be 'tested' on the other part of the data; a semi-replication that gives some sense of the robustness of the categories and interpretations that emerged from the analysis of the first three focus-group transcripts.

In a later stage, the remaining focus group data (respondents 18 through 31) were prepared in the same manner. One large text base was created, containing these new quotations, that was used for 'testing' the interpretations and categories that were developed.

4.5.3. ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS, STEP BY STEP

STEP 1: Open coding of the material

The first step that was taken in analysing the focus-group quotations of the first 17 respondents, was open coding of the material. In the process of open coding, each quotation is carefully read, and two types of codes are assigned to it: codes referring to predefined (abstract) sensitising concepts, and low-abstraction codes that are very close to the wordings of the respondent and that indicate the concrete content of the quotation.

The sensitising concepts that were formulated at forehand referred to the first-order goals for social approval: status, behavioural confirmation and affection. A precarious balance had to be maintained in using the theoretical concepts as sensitising concepts in open coding: I had to describe these concepts sufficiently clear to be able to assign the adequate code to quotations, yet refrain from imposing a too heavy a priori bias that would distort the eventual results. To mitigate the problematic nature of this step (how can the reader know whether all the things that she distils out of the data are not simply first put in there by herself?) I explicated the clues that I used to decide on assigning the codes for the sensitising concepts to a quotation.

The sensitising concept *status* was initially defined very vaguely as the feeling to do or be able to do something special, receiving compliments, respect or admiration, or the feeling of distinguishing oneself from others.

The sensitising concept *behavioural confirmation* was described vaguely as receiving approval for one's behaviour, the feeling of belonging to a group or community, feeling accepted there, or a feeling of shared behavioural norms and values.

The sensitising concept *affection* was initially described as caring about someone or being cared for by someone, feeling one's own well-being is affected by the well-being of the other, or the reciprocity of feelings being more relevant than actual behaviour.

Using the broadly described sensitising concepts, the quotations of the first 17 respondents were open-coded. Each quotation was carefully read, after which one or more of the *main codes* (i.e. codes referring to the sensitising concepts status, behavioural confirmation and affection) were assigned to it if the descriptions fitted the content of the quotation (no main code was assigned if none of the descriptions were relevant). Additionally, one or several key words of low abstraction were assigned that reflected the (non-abstract) substantive content of the quotation. These low abstraction keywords are also called the sub-codes in the following. In the beginning of the process of open coding, the list of keywords that were assigned grew fast, almost each quotation requiring a new keyword. Gradually, however, fewer and fewer new key words needed to be introduced: after a certain amount of coding most new quotations could be adequately characterised by one of the already used keywords. This is an indication that the open coding reaches the stage of *saturation* (cf. Wester 1995, e.g. p.45, 58): if all statements of a new respondent about his social well-being and his social production functions

can be adequately coded with existing keywords, these keywords probably cover the main important aspects of social production functions and their product.¹⁰

Codes	text segment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AFFECTION • AFF-7: interdependency of well-being • AFF-7b: loss of control over own well-being • AFF-16: missing someone • RES-13: parents • RES-6: spouse • RES-9: children • ACT-17: visiting parents • ACT-12: being there/spending time together • ACT-25: comforting someone 	<p>Frank: “Of course it is sad that my father is gone, and I do miss him, but what hurts most is to see how badly my mother misses him. And that is something you cannot help. You cannot relieve her pain of missing him.</p> <p>And, like you say, it feels good to comfort her a bit by being there a few times a week, but at the same time, these past two years since my father died, it is not enough...Not adequate for really comforting her”.</p>

Figure 4.1.: Example of text segment with codes referring to main concepts and concrete content

The decision when sufficient saturation is achieved remains somewhat arbitrary of course, as it will always be possible to find people and instances that deviate from the devised list of keywords. But when the researcher has ensured sufficient variation in the relevant main variables through the selection of material (based on theoretical expectations), the saturation criterion and pragmatic considerations help decide when to proceed to the next step in the analysis. In the case of this study, I found saturation increasing from respondent 12 onward, and becoming almost complete around respondent 15. Because of the fact that respondents 11 through 17 participated in the same focus group, I decided to use the material of these first 17 respondents for the exploratory analysis, and preserve the materials of the other respondents for confirmation.

STEP 2: Exploratory analysis of the aspects of the first-order goals

The open coding having been completed, the next step was an inspection of the preliminary list of quotations for each of the sensitising concepts (each of the first-order goals, status, behavioural confirmation, and affection). First inspection revealed the necessity of a much more precise categorisation of the quotations, as in the initial set of quotations for each of the first-order goals different types of statements were present, some of which were irrelevant to the analytical questions of the following steps. For example, the quotations contained both statements about the respondents' own level and production of the first-order goals, and about

¹⁰ Note, however, that this saturation-indication assumes a representative mix of cases in the exploration-sample: if in the cases used for the open coding some relevant variables are not represented, the criterion for saturation is not valid. In the present study, there was a slight bias or lack of representativity in the cases used for open coding, because the first 17 respondents have on average a higher SES than later respondents. This bias seems not to be very serious, however, as three of the first 17 respondents have low levels of education and three are unemployed. In testing the categories and interpretations from the exploratory analyses on the data from later respondents, I found that saturation had not been complete for the concrete production factors that people use, but that regarding the conceptualisation of the first-order goals, the metagoals, and contexts and mechanisms, the codes and categories developed on the basis of the first 17 respondents were adequate and sufficient.

the level and production of the first-order goals by others or in general. For the exploratory analysis of the theoretical concepts, where the concepts are the units of analysis, all these quotations could be retained. But for later steps in the analysis, where the focus shifts to the respondents as the units of analysis, the statements about others would have to be removed. In this phase of the analysis, the first question was which aspects of the theoretical concepts could be discerned in the qualitative material. As explained under step 1, the assignment of quotations to first-order goals was performed on the basis of broadly and generally formulated criteria. This means that, for every quotation under each of the first-order goal labels, at least one of the broad descriptions of a sensitising concept applied to it. But this does not mean that the broad descriptions really touch the essence of the theoretical concept, and even less that they sufficiently represent the main different aspects these concepts may have. So the second step in the analysis investigates what the empirical instances of the theoretical concepts reveal about the essence and aspects of these concepts.

In the following explanation of the procedure I will take *status* as an example; the procedure followed for the other two first-order goals are identical.

In order to answer this question, first a list of sub-codes that co-occurred with the main code 'status' was created. This list did not provide easy answers to the question however, as many of the sub-codes referred to production factors rather than to aspects of status, and also, due to the fact that sometimes two main codes were assigned to one quotation, not all sub-codes on the lists were necessarily related to the status-concept or the production of status. So, I tried a different approach. All quotations assigned to the main code 'status' were thoroughly re-read, and for each quotation the decisive clue for assigning the code 'status' to it was marked. Sometimes this could be achieved by simply underlining the words that signalled relevance to *status*, sometimes a short remark was made in the margins explaining what characteristic of the statement I had interpreted as the link to status.

After in fact having recoded the quotations in this way, the underlined fragments and the remarks in the margins were listed and compared with each other. It appeared that only a moderate amount of different 'clues' (about 30) accounted for all (159) status-quotations, while several of the 30 clues were almost synonyms. To check whether possibly synonymous clues indeed could be brought under one heading, the quotations to which they referred were compared, and the clues were either merged when apparently meaning the same thing, or, if not, their formulation was sharpened in order to express more clearly their different connotations. This resulted in a list of 18 clues, for which in a further comparison of the relevant quotations the possible interrelations were explored. This was done by comparing, for each combination of clues, the quotations to which either one or both clues were assigned, and carefully registering any statement about the relation between the clues. For most combinations of clues only a few statements regarding their possible interrelation were available, which of course meant that I had to be reticent concerning the possibility to generalise the findings. Still, the available statements generally agreed on the existence, type and direction of possible relations between aspects of status. Complementary to the qualitative data, I used existing literature to check or validate emerging ideas and conjectures about the aspects and causation of status (and likewise for affection and behavioural confirmation). The resulting ideas about the aspects of the first-order instrumental goals, as well as the clues and the information provided by the material about their meaning and possible interrelations were then described in a reflective memo, and summarised in a graphical representation using the Atlas/ti network building tool.

The exploration of the aspects of the first-order instrumental goals was concluded by the formulation of a new list of sub-codes on the basis of the reflective memo. Then a check was performed to make sure that all status-quotations from the exploration material (the first 17 respondents) could be adequately coded using only the codes from this list, which appeared to work well. In a later phase of the analyses, I used this code list in testing the results of the exploratory analyses on the remaining data, from respondents 18 through 31.

STEP 3: Exploratory analysis of the fields for the production of the first-order goals

In this step, the data from the first 17 respondents were used to derive a classification of the so-called empirical *fields* where the production of the first-order goals can take place. In terms of the grounded theory approach (Wester 1995; Glaser & Strauss 1967), fields are classes of empirical situations for which theoretical or sensitising concepts are elaborated (or *grounded*). Examples of *fields* in this sense could be classrooms, hospitals, families et cetera.

Usually, in studies applying a grounded theory approach, only one field is considered, or at least only one field at a time. In the present study, however, an undetermined number of fields needs to be investigated in order to get a more or less complete view of people's social production functions. For it follows directly from SPF theory that all activities a person performs are relevant for his social and physical well-being, thus all fields where he participates may be relevant. In order to be able to elaborate the sensitising concepts for all the relevant fields, i.e. in order to develop sensitive and relevant specifications for all fields (the field-related concepts, Wester 1995, p. 52, 57), I first needed a reasonably complete list of the fields that should be considered.

The procedure I used to derive that list was quite straightforward: for each of the first-order goals separately, all assigned quotations were re-read, and for every quotation a detailed note was made about the context to which the statement referred. After doing this for all quotations for a first-order goal, there resulted a detailed list of all the contexts the respondents had referred to when talking about their social production functions.

The separate lists for the first-order goals were then re-arranged until all entries were logically grouped together, and summarising labels were given to all clusters of entries. Of course, the arranging of the detailed contexts could be done in different manners, and subjectivity in choosing a certain ordering was inevitable. However, as can be seen in Chapter 6, where the eventual classification of fields is presented, the detailed contexts were arranged in such a way that the resulting classification of fields strongly resembles the different contexts that most people are probably used to distinguish, as it reflects the way most activities and relations in contemporary Dutch society are institutionalised.

The separate classification of contexts for the three different first-order goals led to highly similar results, which is not surprising, because at least some degree of multi-functionality could be expected for all fields. The three resulting classifications could thus easily be merged into one classification of fields, in which all entries from each of the lists of contexts for the three first-order goals could be categorised¹¹.

From this step in the exploratory analysis, I derived the expectation (or hypothesis) that the classification of fields I arrived at is adequate to represent all contexts from which people get social well-being. This expectation was 'tested' in the later analysis of the data from the remaining respondents, leading to the corroboration of this 'hypothesis' that the proposed

¹¹ Naturally, some of the fields in the classification bear more significance for one first-order goal than for the others. The 'private domain - personal relations' - field will generally be of more importance for affection than for status, while for the field 'public domain - productive activities' the reverse is likely to hold.

classification of fields also represents all the relevant contexts for the production of social approval of other than the first 17 respondents¹².

STEP 4: Exploratory analysis of the production factors for the first-order goals

After having identified the fields for the production of social well-being (in step 3) and having elaborated the conceptualisation of the three first-order goals (in step 2), it was now possible to proceed to the next step in the exploratory analysis: the identification of production factors per first-order goal per field of production. This of course is essential in view of the core concern of quality of life studies (cf. Chapter 2): relating subjective well-being with the objective factors that affect it. This fourth step is in fact the inventory of how people produce social well-being, as it investigates which activities and resources are used to produce the three forms of social well-being; which activities serve several or just one of the first-order goals; which fields are more or less important to the realisation of the specific first-order goals; and, following from this, which activities and resources are generally relevant, so that they should be included in an investigation of the realisation of social well-being.

The same focus-group data from the first 17 respondents were again used for the identification of production factors and production activities per first-order goal per field.

The procedure was straightforward: as both a code for the corresponding first-order instrumental goal(s) and a code for the relevant field(s) of production were now assigned to every quotation in the data, Atlas/ti was used to retrieve all quotations for each combination of the six fields and three first-order goals subsequently. These quotations were then searched for production factors, that is, for indications that certain resources and activities serve the production of the corresponding first-order goal. These production factors were then listed for each 'field of production'-'first-order goal' combination. Obviously, this procedure resulted in an inventory of production factors by fields by goals that was both incomplete (given the unlimited number of potential production factors, it would be impossible even with a far larger number of respondents to obtain an exhaustive inventory), and unmanageable (because the number of production factors it contained was far too large to translate directly into indicators).

To deal with this, the separate production factors that had been identified had to be brought back, by moving to a somewhat higher level of abstraction, to a smaller number of factors, and then, for each 'field of production'-'first-order goal' combination, the lists of these somewhat more abstract production factors had to be completed. The first part of this endeavour was of course a matter of interpretation and theorising instead of data analysis. For the second part of the task, the completion of the lists of production factors, however, the data did provide important clues. I compared each cell of the matrix of first-order goals by fields of production first with the other cells in the same row, and second, with the other cells in the same column. Thus, the production factors mentioned in e.g. the cell for the realisation of status in the field of personal relationships, were at the one hand compared with the production factors that in other fields had been found to be applied in the production of status, and at the other hand with the production factors that had been found to be applied for the production of behavioural confirmation and affection in the field of personal relationships. In comparing the production factors for the same first-order goal in other fields, the question was

¹² As implied in footnote 10 of this chapter, this corroboration by the data from respondents 18 through 31 may be considered an even stronger indication of the robustness of the results because of the differences in background characteristics between these later respondents and the first 17 respondents, on whose reported social production functions the exploratory analyses rely.

always whether a production factor (or an equivalent of it) that had been found in one field could also - at least in theory - serve the production of the same first-order goal in other fields. Production factors for which this seemed at least theoretically possible were then added to the list of production factors for that first-order goal in other fields.

In comparing the production factors for the other first-order goals in the same field, I every time considered whether the specific production factor in a particular cell could also serve the production of the other first-order goals in that same field, and if so, what characteristics or aspects of the production factor would determine whether status, behavioural confirmation or affection be realised. In this way I sought to make explicit, for each production factor that played a role in the production of more than one first-order goal, what are its relevant aspects for each of the three distinguished first-order goals for social well-being.

STEP 5: Exploratory analysis of goals concerning form and quality of production functions

For the conceptualisation of the relevant aspects of the quality and form of social production functions (the metagoals), I used a largely similar procedure as for the first-order instrumental goals. In the first step, the open coding of the data, the set of sensitising concepts I could use for these goals was - in contrast to that for the first-order goals for social approval - not complete, as thus far in SPF theory only scattered and not exhaustive suggestions about metagoals are found. Previous writings on SPF theory suggested metagoals or quality aspects such as safety, efficiency, and consistency. These were therefore used as sensitising concepts, but additionally I also assigned codes to any quotations that appeared to refer to some sort of cognitive goal or other type of aspect that could not directly be subsumed under one of the first-order instrumental goals. After having thus coded all data from the first 17 respondents, I re-read all quotations per code that I used, and wrote memo's about all the different aspects and possible goals that the data seemed to suggest, and the possible relations of these aspects to each other and to the existing theoretical framework of SPF theory. While re-examining all these preliminary distinguished aspects, it appeared that some could be merged (as they referred to the same aspect) while other codes needed to be further refined or split. Eventually, through reading and rereading the quotations and the various interpretative memo's, I arrived at the formulation of a hypothetical conceptual framework for the cognitive aspects or quality aspects of social production functions. This framework mirrored the existing theoretical framework of SPF theory in representing also an instrumental hierarchy, but this one depicting the instrumental ordering of metagoals. The instrumentality relations that appeared to exist between various metagoals (or quality aspects) allowed me to organise the more than thirty different aspects into two main (abstract) aspects of the quality of social production functions. Having thus organised these newly developed theoretical concepts, I subsequently used the remaining data (respondents 18 through 31) to validate these results.

4.5.4. ANALYSES OF THE COMPLEMENTARY DATA

Complementary to the focus group data, data were also collected via time use studies and additional individual interviews. As explained before, these additional data were not collected in order to get to know *different* things about the respondents than through the focus group interviews, but rather to complete the information they gave in the focus groups and the preliminary written questionnaires. Looking from a different angle in this case was not aimed at getting a different perspective but just to prevent overlooking relevant information.

The diaries resulting from the time use studies were primarily screened for possibly relevant (with regard to the respondent's social production functions) activities that had not been discussed in the focus group interviews. As the total number of different activities that were

reported was huge, I had to apply some selection criterion for which activities to give attention to. As a rule, I made notes of all activities (a) that were not discussed in the focus group interview, yet appeared to be either a regularly recurring element of the respondent's production functions, or a source of large changes in mood and affective well-being, or both; or (b) that appeared to influence the respondent's mood or affective well-being in a manner or direction contradicting the information given about it in the focus group interview. These activities were listed as items for the subsequent individual interview about the time use diary.

Besides this primary use of the time use data, they were also used as material for drawing up the inventory of main production factors (resources and activities!) per first-order goal per field of production. In order to get a more extensive inventory of relevant production activities per field of production, the activities recorded by the respondents in their time use diaries were categorised in the six fields of production that were identified in step 3 of the analysis of the focus group data (see section 4.5.3.). As mentioned previously, for all the activities that respondents recorded while participating in the time-use study, the *context* of the activity was also registered by means of the first digit of the activity code. This *context* that is registered, is conceptually synonymous to the *fields* for the production of the first order goals¹³. Although the exact ordering and categorisation of the different contexts does not match the ordering that was developed for the fields, the basic idea according to which both provide a context to separate activities is the same. Both fields and contexts-codes reflect the general way in which contemporary Dutch (Western) society is organised, i.e. the main recognisable institutionalised forms in which people live and act and spend their time. By categorising activities, according to their context-codes in the time use study, to the (more or less) corresponding fields for the production of the first order goals, a considerable number of concrete production factors could be added to the preliminary inventory of production factors per goal per field. Of course, only after further theoretical consideration and checking of my interpretations in the subsequent individual interviews, the tentative categorisation was either accepted or adjusted.

The additional individual interviews with the participants of the time use studies were all different, tailored closely to the issues that were found incompletely covered in the initial focus group interviews and preliminary questionnaires or that emerged as potentially relevant from the time use studies. The information obtained in these complementary individual interviews was used for the qualitative analyses in one or two ways. One way in which the complementary information was used, was help the interpretation of the focus group data, where statements were ambiguous and allowed alternative interpretations, of which I was uncertain which to choose. In some cases the complementary data were also used in a second

¹³ Obviously, in collecting the time-use data, standard categories were used for the registration of activity-contexts, because the time use studies were performed partly simultaneous with the (later) focus groups, and largely prior to the analyses of the focus-group data. Yet, linking the context-codes from the time-use data to the fields that were defined in step 3 of the analysis of the focus-group data turned out to be very straightforward. The contexts that were used in collecting the time-use data are ordered as follows: 0- paid work; 1- housekeeping, including gardening and odd jobs; 2- child care and child raising 3- shopping; 4- personal needs; 5-education, courses; 6- religious participation, action-groups, neighbourhood councils, political parties etc.; 7- social and cultural life; 8- sports and active recreation; 9- use of media: radio, tv, PC, reading. Each of these contexts is further subdivided into detailed categories indicating the type of activity, plus the type of social interaction (if involved), allowing to find equivalent categories in the time use data for practically all of the sub-fields of the ordering of fields.

way: if they contained new information which added something substantial (i.e. more than a support for interpretation) to the focus group data, the respondents' statements were transcribed and added to the original focus group data of that respondent, to be analysed just like the focus group transcripts.

